

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY MONROVIA

TO SECSSTATE WASHDC 9323

UNCLAS MONROVIA 3548

FOR DICK MOOSE AND PAT DERIAN FROM AMBASSADOR

PASS GOLA BUTCHER AID/AA/AFR

E.O. 11652 N/A

TAGS: SHUM, EAID, LI

SUBJECT: HUMAN RIGHTS AND FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

REF: A) STATE 101448, B) STATE 102727, C) STATE 113365

1. IN RESPONSE TO REFTELS I AM AWARE OF AT LEAST THREE AREAS FOR POSITIVE ACTION THAT THE US MISSION MIGHT TAKE TO TACKLE SPECIFIC HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS OR REINFORCE POSITIVE HUMAN RIGHTS TRENDS IN LIBERIA.

2. THE FIRST AREA, WHICH MAY HAVE THE GREATEST NEGATIVE EFFECT UPON RURAL DEVELOPMENT, INVOLVES LAND TENURE RIGHTS OF SMALL FARMERS. THE DUAL LAND TENURE SYSTEM IN LIBERIA, ONE MODERN AND ONE TRIBAL, HAS WORKED WELL IN THE PAST WHEN POPULATION PRESSURES WERE MINIMAL AND SHIFTING CULTIVATION THE PREDOMINANT FORM OF AGRICULTURE. HOWEVER, THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION CHARACTERIZED BY THE PERMANENT CULTIVATION OF HIGH-VALUE CASH CROPS IS BRINGING THESE TWO SYSTEMS INTO CONFLICT. THE BREAKDOWN OF THE TRIBAL LAND TENURE SYSTEM LEAVES THE AREAS CONCERNED VULNERABLE TO THE LAND SPECULATIONS OF THE URBAN ELITE. NOT SURPRISINGLY, THERE HAS BEEN HESITANCY BY THE GOL IN ADDRESSING THIS PROBLEM.

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3. TO MEET THIS GROWING PROBLEM, A LAND REGISTRATION PROGRAM HAS BEEN INCORPORATED WITHIN THE BONG COUNTY INTEGRATED RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECT. IT SHOULD SERVE AS A PILOT MODEL FOR A COUNTRYWIDE PROGRAM. ASSISTANCE FROM THE LAND TENURE CENTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN AND THE PEACE CORPS IS CONTEMPLATED IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BONG COUNTY PROJECT. USAID HAS ALSO

HELD DISCUSSIONS WITH OTHER NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS
ON THE POSSIBILITY OF COMBINING THEIR EFFORTS IN THE FUTURE.

4. THE SECOND AREA INVOLVING HUMAN RIGHTS IS THE CONSTITUTIONAL
PROVISION WHICH RESTRICTS LIBERIAN CITIZENSHIP TO "NEGROS OR
PERSONS OF NEGRO DESCENT." THE CONSTITUTION LIMITS OWNERSHIP OF
LAND TO LIBERIAN CITIZENS. A SPECIAL PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION,
"THE PRIVATE SECTOR COMMISSION ON IMPROVING INVESTMENT POSSIBILITIES
IN LIBERIA" RECOMMENDED IN ITS REPORT THAT THE CONSTITUTION BE
AMENDED SO THAT NON-CITIZENS CAN PURCHASE LAND UNDER CERTAIN
PRESCRIBED CONDITIONS. THE COMMISSION FELT THAT SUCH LAND
PURCHASES WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT. THIS IS AN
EXTREMELY SENSITIVE AND CONTROVERSIAL ISSUE IN LIBERIA. I AM
ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THIS PROBLEM SINCE LIBERIA HAS ALREADY
BEEN CRITICIZED FOR THIS CONSTITUTIONAL RESTRICTION AS A VIOLATION
OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

5. FINALLY, RECENT AMENDMENT TO THE TREASON AND SEDITION LAW
MAY POTENTIALLY CAUSE, IF IMPROPERLY ADMINISTERED, WHAT WE
REFER TO IN THE U.S. AS AN ABRIDGEMENT OF THE FIRST AMENDMENT
FREEDOMS.

6. I HAVE ASKED EMBASSY AND USAID/L OFFICERS COLLABORATIVELY
TO KEEP ABREAST OF NEW DEVELOPMENTS AND TO CONTINUE TO
GIVE HUMAN RIGHTS SPECIAL ATTENTION AND CONCERN. THEY WILL BE
LOOKING INTO THOSE AREAS WHERE THERE IS SCOPE FOR GREATER
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INVOLVEMENT, PARTICULARLY OF THE POOR.
CARTER

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